

JCAS in Operation Anaconda—It's Not All Bad News

Colonel Neuenswander, an A-10 pilot (El Cid), was the Deputy Commander of the 332d Air Expeditionary Group (AEG) at Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait, from July 2001 to July 2002; the 332d AEG flew fighter sorties in Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom, including Operation Anaconda. In March 2002, he led the A-10 detachment that deployed forward into Afghanistan in support of Operation Anaconda and then redeployed that unit to Bagram Air Base where he became the first AEG Commander in Afghanistan. Colonel Neuenswander flew A-10 sorties as a Forward Air Control (Airborne) (FAC(A)) in support of Operation Anaconda.

Editor

Since the first articles concerning Operation Anaconda “hit the street” in *Field Artillery* [September-October 2002], virtually every aspect of what went wrong in that operation has been discussed. Very little attention has been given to those things that went right—and many did.

I believe it is important to acknowledge what our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines accomplished with respect to close air support (CAS) during and after Operation Anaconda. In that regard, I address some of the points made in the article “JCAS in Afghanistan: Fixing the Tower of Babel” [by Lieutenant Colonel John M. Jansen, et al] published in the March-April edition and what must be done in the future to ensure joint CAS (JCAS) best contributes to the fight.

Tactical Chaos Due to Inadequate Operational Planning. In the article, the authors gave a great description of the fog and friction of war that existed over the battlefield during the first several nights of the operation. The A-10 the Hornet almost collided with on the night of 5 March 2002 was under my command, and I was as unhappy as the Hornet pilot was about the chaos over the battlefield.

Most of the problems the authors discussed were tactical-level execution problems caused by an absence of planning at the operational level. The operational-level command and control mechanism that should have prevented most of this chaos is the theater air control system/Army air-ground system, also known as the TACS/AAGS. This is a

joint system made up of Army and Air Force organizations.

For a variety of reasons, only parts of the system were operational when the shooting started on 2 March. There was little capability built into the system to handle high-volume, extremely close air support, and there was rampant confusion about CAS and time-sensitive targeting (TST). The bottom line is that there was a lack of shared information and joint planning before the operation.

Some significant complaints the “Tower of Babel” authors raised were no mission briefings, no idea where friendly forces were, no area of operations check-in briefings and updates, TACPs [tactical air control parties] arguing over who was to get the CAS, not enough contact points (CPs) for holding and deconfliction, and lack of deconfliction of CAS assets in the target area. All these issues could have been solved by planning for and setting up a healthy air support operations center (ASOC) within radio range of the Shah-e-Kot Valley. The ASOC is the US Air Force control element that resides at the senior Army headquarters and is a critical part of the TACS/AAGS system.

Immediately after Anaconda, the Combined Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC) directed a theater-wide CAS emergency conference where we took a hard look at command and control and discussed the very high target approval levels and centralized execution that posed restrictions on flight leaders in the air. These restrictions were manageable when we were engaging targets sporadically in the

weeks before Anaconda, but they proved inadequate when we unexpectedly transitioned to two weeks of high-intensity CAS and TST operations. These issues were addressed at the CFACC’s CAS conference and forwarded to the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) where they eventually made their way into the [air tasking order (ATO)] special instructions (SPINS) for follow-on Operation Enduring Freedom operations.

Talk-Ons and Nine-Line Briefings.

I take a different perspective than the “Tower of Babel” authors on their claims that CAS talk-ons are relatively easy and should have been done more often and that the TACPs should not have abbreviated their nine-line CAS briefings. I did a number of talk-ons in Afghanistan and found Afghanistan to be the most challenging place I have ever done CAS, even though I had a God’s eye view from my A-10.

The repetitive terrain east of the Shah-e-Kot valley is devoid of roads and significant cultural features. There are several different valleys that run east from the Shah-e-Kot, and only one of them has what could be called a river in it. (During Anaconda, the Army referred to these valleys as “Rat Lines.”)

Talk-ons were made even more difficult for the TACPs because many of them were collocated with the units they supported at the bottom of the valley with limited line-of-sight due to terrain. In an effort to get the aircraft overhead so they could ease pilot target acquisition, the TACPs got in the habit of abbreviating the standard CAS nine-line, which is acceptable under *Joint Publication 3-09.3 [Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Close Air Support]*. Unfortunately, when a TACP abbreviates a nine-line and briefs the first three lines as “N/A,” the CAS platform has no initial point (IP), heading or distance to reference. The CAS platform proceeds directly to the target and holds overhead until the terminal controller can talk his eyes or systems on it. If there is more than one terminal controller in the target area, the result is aircraft have to do their best not to hit each other.

I do not blame the controllers for calling the first three lines “N/A” nor can I fault them for not having enough CPs to

deconflict the inbound fighters. These points are published in the ATO and are created by the collective TACS/AAGS system—another planning issue. When the terminal controllers did pass the first three lines of the nine-line briefing, the CAS platforms had no IP or CP and, thus, no airspace to hold in that belonged just to that flight. The lack of these holding points caused deconfliction problems as several different terminal controllers called their CAS platforms overhead to attack separate targets.

The initial deconfliction problem should have been the job of the ASOC and the CAOC, not the TACP on the battlefield.

Dedicated Frequencies for Terminal Controllers. My final disagreement with the “Tower of Babel” article was the recommendation that all terminal controllers have their own working frequency for CAS. The Shah-e-Kot valley was roughly nine kilometers long and five kilometers wide. Inside that valley, the US Air Force had 37 TACPs—that’s almost one TACP per square kilometer. The article’s suggestion that each TACP have its own dedicated control frequency and (or) IP/CP is not realistic.

In one instance, there were six CAS operations simultaneously saving the lives of our troops on the valley floor. Had all six of these flights been on different frequencies, I am certain there would have been a mid-air collision between CAS strikers.

The recommended solution to prevent this possibility is that no CAS platform be allowed in the CAS area without being on a common frequency to deconflict aircraft and munitions.

Anaconda Successes. The “Tower of Babel” article provided an accurate description of the first three nights of the Anaconda operation. It clearly demonstrates how a lack of joint planning with all service component players resulted in substantial command and control problems.

What the article misses, from the CAS perspective, is the positive aspect of how virtually every aircraft in theater came to the aid of our soldiers in the Shah-e-Kot Valley. In addition, by the night of 6 March, the CFACC built an expedient command and control system, solving many of the JCAS problems by the fourth day of the operation.

To avoid Anaconda being written off as a complete failure, it is important to recognize and capture the many posi-

tive actions that occurred during that operation.

Anaconda was arguably successful due to the frantic work of many tireless airmen who pulled together a tactical air control system on the fly. Prior to the kickoff of Operation Anaconda, the senior Air Support Operations Group (ASOG) commander realized that Combined Joint Task Force-Mountain did not have an adequate ASOC assigned at the CJTF/HQ. This ASOG commander immediately begged, borrowed and stole every available air liaison officer (ALO) and enlisted terminal air controller (ETAC) in theater and set up a small CAS cell at Bagram that later transitioned to a full-up ASOC. This foresight proved critical as the battle progressed, and despite the fact that a full-up TACS/AAGS system was overlooked by Operation Anaconda planners, the incredible efforts of these ALOs/ETACs provided huge benefits to the CJTF-Mountain commander, CAOC and CAS aircrews.

By 6 March, the FAC(A)s were in constant contact with the ALOs at Bagram and were taking off with current friendly and enemy positions plotted on their maps. At the same time, the CFACC ordered the ASOG commander, working with Air Expeditionary Wing (AEW) commanders at Al Jaber Air Base and Al Udiid Air Base, Qatar, to devise a plan to put fighter aircrew members on board the joint surveillance and target attack radar system (JSTARS) aircraft to provide command and control as well as the deconfliction function usually performed by the airborne battlespace command and control center (ABCCC). This innovation was in place by 6 March and proved critical to the eventual success of the operation.

When senior air commanders in theater were called upon to provide high-intensity and high-volume CAS and TST to assist in Operation Anaconda, they

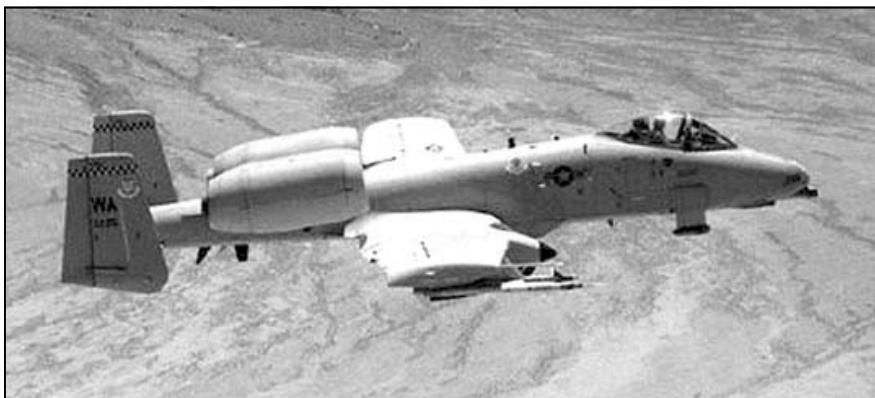
“pulled out the stops.” On the night of 3 March, the CFACC directed the A-10 unit stationed at Al Jaber to move five jets to a classified forward location. This unit launched the first A-10s 12 hours after notification, and the unit was in place from more than 1,400 miles away with its first operational capability 27 hours after notification.

The A-10s conducted CAS and FAC(A) missions and at times performed the ABCCC and airborne warning and control system (AWACS) missions. These aircraft provided a large portion of the TACS/AAGS architecture and significantly aided in target area deconfliction, target acquisition, command and control, and terminal control of CAS platforms.

In their role as CAS fighters, these A-10s were responsible for the destruction of a significant number of enemy targets. This included the total destruction of a large enemy counterattack on 5 March. At one point during Anaconda, the pilots and maintainers of the 74th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron (EFS) provided 21 continuous hours of FAC(A)/CAS coverage over the target area with only four aircraft.

As soon as the runway at Bagram Air Base was repaired and allowed full-length operations, this A-10 unit moved to Bagram to support CJTF-Mountain and served as the backbone for a new AEG. This group, and later wing, was initially manned and supported by the 332d AEG out of Kuwait. The CFACC took a number of key personnel already in theater “out of hide” to build this unit until these positions could be backfilled from the states.

The feat of moving an A-10 unit 1,400 miles in one ATO day is a testimony to the US Air Force’s combat logisticians, Director of Mobility Forces and 332d AEG. Hundreds of professionals in the Mobility Forces truly made this operation possible.



Our airlift and tanker forces reacted to a real-time combat need with little or no notice and did what needed to be done. Whether it was airlifting Apaches from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in less than 72 hours or flying C-17s into austere locations, these folks showed why they are critical to our success in modern warfare.

Many of the logistical lessons learned as a result of moving the 74 EFS twice in two weeks to two different austere bases are now being taught in the US Air Force's Advanced Maintenance and Munitions Officer's Course at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

The US Marine Corps TF-58 commander also played a significant role in Anaconda. On 3 March when intense fire rendered five of the seven AH-64s combat ineffective, USMC TF-58 received a request for support. The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) squadron commander was first notified of a possible deployment early on Sunday, 3 March. He was given the "Execute" order by mid-day and deployed five AH-1W Super Cobras and three CH-53E Super Stallions the next day. Less than 40 hours after receiving the initial warning order, all five Cobras and two of the three CH-53Es had arrived at Bagram Airfield more than 700 nautical miles away.

On 6 March, AH-1 Super Cobras and carrier-based AV-8s flew CAS missions in direct support of Operation Anaconda with no losses—another case of incredible combat logistics linked with operations and one for the record books.

On 4 March, many heroes appeared during the battle on Roberts Ridge following the shoot down of a Special Forces helicopter north of the Shah-e-Kot Valley. Not since Vietnam had Air Force fighters flown repeated, sustained, low-altitude, danger-close CAS attack—inside 100 meters from friendly troops. Two F-15Es and two F-16s provided CAS coverage for more than four hours, ultimately breaking the back of the al Qaeda resistance on the high ground overlooking the helicopter.

US Air Force rescue units flying HH-60 helicopters pulled around-the-clock alert during the battle, rescuing a number of wounded troops at night under the most adverse conditions. Their crews' superb training and equipment made them the aircrews of choice to evacuate many of the wounded, and they performed brilliantly.

On the ground, US Air Force terminal controllers assigned to units of the 10th Mountain and 101st [Air Assault] Divisions got their trials-by-fire as they called in CAS, often while under attack. These terminal air controllers (including a number of USAF combat controllers) performed heroically as did the pararescue men assigned to a number of the teams involved in combat.

On 5 March, members of the 74 EFS (A-10s) in conjunction with the 332d AEG, elements of the 18th ASOG and the CAOC devised a kill-box deconfliction plan to manage the skies over the Shah-e-Kot Valley. The CAOC accepted this plan as written and published it in the daily SPINS for the 6 March ATO. This flexibility enabled the A-10, F-14 and F-16 FAC(A)s to control the airspace with much less fear of conflict problems. By 7 March, the new kill-box plan was fully in effect.

This kill-box plan was critical due to some of the issues mentioned in the "Tower of Babel" article. The initial Anaconda plan did not anticipate the need for high-intensity CAS. Yet, almost immediately after the battle began, pinned down ground units needed CAS and lots of it. Accordingly, the CAOC contacted carrier- and land-based fighters as well as bombers and initiated a maximum effort to both destroy enemy forces and enable our surface forces.

AEGs at Al Jaber, Al Udiad and Diego Garcia tripled the number of jets available with less than 24 hours' notice. Carrier-based fighters did the same. The massive number of aircraft available to the CFACC for CAS by 5 March overwhelmed the original airspace deconfliction plan. The new kill-box plan was implemented quickly, proved flexible and worked well.

This summary of JCAS in Operation Anaconda is not close to being all-inclusive of the magnificent air attack efforts conducted. This operation was as close to a maximum effort as many of us will ever see.

When our Army and Air Force brethren were being assaulted on the ground, airmen did everything they could to help them. For these efforts during the two weeks of Anaconda, Air Force members—in the air and on the ground—were awarded two posthumous Air Force Crosses, 12 Silver Stars and 52 Distinguished Flying Crosses.

There are hundreds of positive lessons from Anaconda.

On the Air Force side, Task Force Enduring Look took thousands of hours of interviews and is still in the process of providing observations and lessons from Air Force participation in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Joint CAS Training. After leaving the Operation Enduring Freedom in the Afghani Theater, I assumed command of the US Air Force Air Ground Operations School (AGOS) at Nellis AFB. This school was moved to Nellis in 1997 specifically to maximize CAS training between the Air Force and Army, primarily at the National Training Center (NTC) [Fort Irwin, California].

AGOS teaches the Joint Firepower Course (JFC) for the Air Force and Army and runs the CAS portion of the NTC and Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) [Fort Polk, Louisiana]. At AGOS we are committed to improving CAS operations and work hand-in-hand with the Army and USMC to design optimal processes and procedures to execute this toughest of all joint missions.

To that end, we are attempting to increase the amount of CAS play and its impact at both the JRTC and NTC, so our young officers do not take the wrong lessons away from these major training events. Recent visits of AGOS members to Forts Leavenworth [Kansas], Campbell, Rucker [Alabama], and Sill [Oklahoma] have been very productive.

Those of us in the air-to-ground business are doing all we can to ensure we train for CAS at every opportunity. With this training, we will build the trust needed to make CAS as effective as possible.

The Joint Firepower Course always has emphasized joint planning as the key to CAS success. Anaconda has re-emphasized this point and demonstrated the real-world consequences of not enough joint planning prior to operations anticipating CAS.

The real lesson of Anaconda is about modern joint warfare—we have to ensure the air component is included in the planning of ground operations and vice versa...only then can we achieve the synergy of both.

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Commo Systems Lack the Human Element

The following three letters are responses to the article "Why Can't Joe Get the Lead Out?" by Colonel Gary H. Cheek and the letter-to-the-editor "Artillery—Never Leave Home Without It (And Don't Forget the 'Dumb' Rounds)" by Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) John M. Perkins, Infantry, in the January-February edition.

Editor

Back to the Future

I was involved in the Crusader program from 1991 until its cancellation last year. I watched Louisiana Maneuvers, Army After Next, Army XXI, digitization, etc., come and go. I sat in hours of briefings and watched millions of dollars spent trying to fit this cannon system into each new "paradigm," and I could never understand why nobody "Got it."

I participated in innumerable discussions about the esoterica of precision and accuracy, cannons versus rockets, counterfire, target sets, fractional damage—you name it. And while Crusader always provided incredible battlefield results no matter the scenario, none of us ever got it quite right.

So, I was astounded when I read the letter from LTC Jenkins and the article by COL Cheek. The juxtaposition of those two pieces in one issue was brilliant and provided me a crystal clear vision of why we, collectively, got it all

wrong about what is so important about cannon fire support.

COL Cheek was perfect in his description of what is really missing from the heart of cannon artillery direct support [DS]. You can't automate emotion, you can't automate urgency, you can't automate dealing with the incredibly rapid and unpredictable environment of the DS mission (if that is an acceptable term) in close combat. Can you imagine an FO's [forward observer's] having to look down to use his fingers on a keypad while watching a bad guy move in on his position at night, in the rain, with gloves on, etc.?

LTC Perkins hit it dead-on when he described the situations he and his FOs repeatedly found themselves in. He especially got it right when he talked about the kinds of responses he expected and got from his Redlegs who performed the DS mission and talked to FOs and, as necessary, directly to the maneuver soldier.

What he wanted and got, what Audie Murphy wanted and got, what Dragon 6 and Lieutenant Dewitt wanted and got was pretty profound: cannon artillery fires—on time, on target—that always were adjusted because things changed. And each got those fires from somebody he knew.

Everybody can play in the fire support game when things are planned, set and clear—ground-, air- and sea-based fires. But I firmly believe that the dynamics of the close fight have not changed, that only one "Bad Boy" can play when things get close and tough and mean and nasty. That is, or it used to be, cannon artillery responding to an FO who sits in the same foxhole with his infantry brothers.

If the articles I have read over these past several years were any indication, I'd bet we'd be hard pressed to find an active duty infantryman who loves his Cannoneers like LTC Perkins does, and that's, in Perkins' words, "criminal" and, it's our fault.

If we can't restore that love by providing the human element to ensure the foot soldier gets the steel he needs, we might as well move Block House Signal Mountain to Huntsville.

LTC(R) David V. Crowell, FA
Minneapolis, MN

Digital Commo Tools Not Fielded

Colonel Gary H. Cheek's article spoke to a subject that pained me during my time as a battalion FDO [fire direction officer] in an active duty battalion charged with direct support [DS] of a light infantry brigade and, more recently, during my time as the battalion FDO for a National Guard general support [GS] unit. That subject is "artillery digital communication systems."

COL Cheek's article was the most courageous and brutally honest critique of any subject I've read in your magazine.

COL Cheek is correct when he states that the human element of fire support has been lost during the implementation of digital systems. And his written words echo the private thoughts of the officers and NCOs charged with making current artillery digital systems work.

Advancement in the name of digital "progress" has done little to improve the overall performance of the Field Artillery. More often than not, these

systems only have served to unnecessarily complicate our branch's mission.

The essence of this article is not that digital communications are an inappropriate priority for the Field Artillery. Certainly, digital communications between battalion and battery FDCs [fire direction centers] greatly speeds the processing of fire missions. And safety during missions is greatly improved by digital communications between the battery FDC and individual howitzer sections (so the chief of section can visually verify fire commands)—despite the fact that the gun display unit [GDU] is an unreliable system ripe for replacement by a more modern version.

Digital communications technology has the potential to greatly improve the capabilities of the artillery, but the systems that have been fielded so far do not deliver the connectivity required.

This trend is continuing. The infamous "red gumball" displayed by the

AFATDS [advanced FA tactical data system] has stopped far more fire missions in training than any simulated enemy action.

It takes several days of setup for us to establish connectivity between disparate digital systems during a division or corps Warfighter exercise, and the Battle Simulation Center where Warfighter exercises are conducted is a much less primitive environment than the field.

The design of these systems has equally stressed all potential nodes in the fire support network in the names of "flexibility" and "oversight." However, when digital systems are designed, emphasis should be placed on the sensor and shooter. This all-or-none approach incorporated into systems like AFATDS has sacrificed simplicity and reliability.

COL Cheek is dead-on in his assessment. Current digital systems fail to deliver reliable connectivity and are too complex for soldiers to gain proficiency on, particularly our time-constrained Reserve Component artillery units.

What we need is a system that is easy to set up (fewer, more compact and reliable components), simple to operate (the “Burger King” approach), operates on a simple network that prioritizes the sensor and shooter and doesn’t require extensive training to troubleshoot.

Computerized artillery systems have revolutionized our pursuit of accurate fires. However, the communications systems our branch uses have failed to make fires any more responsive.

“Going digital” has been stressed down to the officers and NCOs at the battery

level. But our junior officers and NCOs cannot meet digital connectivity expectations with the tools they have been given to do the job.

CPT Brett A. Saffell, INARNG
Commander, B/2-150 FA

You’re Darn Tootin’!

I am a computer operator in F Battery, 7th Field Artillery, 25th Infantry Division [Light] Artillery at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and I just finished the article “Why Can’t Joe Get the Lead Out?” I have been thinking about this same thing for a long time, but every time I said anything similar, everybody seemed to look at me like I was nuts and just afraid of change. I got the look that said, “Deal with it—you *have* to learn AFATDS.”

And, I am actually in favor of automated and digital communications—to a point.

I recently finished a JRTC [Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana] rotation, and there were so many problems with this system, starting at the battalion level, that I often wondered if soldiers on the other end of this training exercise were “dying” because we could not get our act together.

Every mission should be sent as quickly as possible, and I don’t think the soldiers being rushed or attacked by an enemy who greatly outnumbers them care about our attack guidance, loss of digital communications or the four or five cells the mission has to go through in order to get to me or my big heavy M198 howitzers that have to shift onto

the target. All they want to hear is “Shot” and “Splash.”

I can honestly say that other than the live-fire portion of this last rotation, I did not talk to a forward observer. If I did receive a voice mission, it was only from battalion because digital went down again and battalion finally broke down and sent the mission by voice. This mission, of course, was probably too late because battalion had spent so much time trying to send it digitally! Thus, we end up in a vicious cycle.

When the FDC [fire direction center] receives a fire mission digitally, the sense of urgency is the same as for any other mission. We get it out as fast as possible and remind the guns they need to hurry. The computer operator has his finger on the mouse button ready to send, “Shot.” The RTO [radio-telephone operator] holds his hand microphone and gets ready to send voice “Shot” because the digital “Shot” only goes through about half the time. The chart operator begins to put the round on his target grid, and finally the HTU [handheld terminal unit] operator opens up his subs field looking for more missions.

As you see, the process is automatic, almost robotic. There is no feeling, understanding or urgency because we don’t know the soldier or soldiers on the other end, and we certainly don’t know the

situation. Receive the mission...process it...*Boom*...wait for correction—that is all there is to it.

But when you hear a soldier on the other end saying, “We need those rounds *now*, Over,” then you know that what you are doing is for the good of your fellow soldiers in combat. You know you are shooting at a force trying to kill your brothers, and you feel a certain bond and great sense of relief when you can hear that same voice come on the radio again and adjust the fire.

That is what artillery is all about. We are not about computers, radios and radars. We are about timely, accurate fires.

If I had my way, I would chuck that big white box out the window, hook up the LCU [lightweight computer unit] with the BCS [battery computer system] in it and process the mission. I wouldn’t have to worry about AFATDS’ “gumballs,” attack criteria, lockups (which happen quite often and only at the most inconvenient times) and OPFAC [operational facility] reconfiguration messages.

Give me two charts, a radio and a well-trained FDO [fire direction officer], and I promise accurate, timely fires in support of any unit.

SGT Marshall S. Poland
Computer Operator, F/7 FA
25th IN Division, Schofield Barracks, HI

40th Div Arty Has Woman Commander

In July 2002, Lieutenant Colonel (Promotable) (LTC) Jane M. Anderholt took command of the 40th Infantry Division (Mechanized) Artillery of the California Army National Guard (CAARNG). She likely is the first woman to command a division artillery or even a brigade-level FA unit in the Total Army.

In her previous two assignments, she served as the 40th Div Arty Executive Officer (XO) and Commander of the 40th Rear Operations Center in the CAARNG. Other command and staff positions include serving as XO for the Forward Support Battalion, Assistant Fire Support Coordinator (AFSCOORD), Div Arty S2 and Commander of the Div Arty Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, all in the 40th Division. In Lance missile units while on active duty, LTC Anderholt was the S2 for the 3d Battalion, 79th Field Artillery (3-79 FA) in Germany and a Firing Platoon Leader in 6-33 FA at Fort Sill Oklahoma. She was appointed to the CAARNG in 1990.

LTC Anderholt also served in the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill in the Weapons Department, teaching the Lance Officer’s Course and the PreCommand Course. It was during this tour that she received her Force Modernization functional area. She was involved in the Lance conversion to the multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS), among other modernization projects.

She holds an MBA from Oklahoma City University and is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

